

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 559

By Roberts

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Sonny James, The Southern Gentleman.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Sonny James, an innovative and multitalented musician, singer, recording artist, producer, and a true legend of country music; and

WHEREAS, born Jimmie Hugh Loden in Hackleburg, Alabama, he was affectionately called “Sonny Boy” by his family, and he used that nickname to form his stage and recording persona; and

WHEREAS, a tall, lanky youth, Sonny James became known as The Southern Gentleman in appreciation of his boyish smile and soft spoken, polite manner; and

WHEREAS, according to *Billboard* statistics, for almost twenty years, Sonny James spent more time in the number-one chart position than any other artist in country music, for a total of fifty-seven weeks; and

WHEREAS, this incredible string included twenty-one number-one hits and a five-year period of sixteen consecutive number-one singles, a feat never accomplished before or since by any solo artist in country music, pop, or rock and roll; incorporating the same criteria used today for determining number-one singles, Mr. James would have accumulated an unbelievable twenty-five number-one consecutive hits; and

WHEREAS, a country music legend whose recording career spanned four decades, Sonny James began his meteoric rise to fame with his multimillion-selling 1956 record, “Young Love,” which was also his first number-one hit; and

WHEREAS, between 1953 and 1983, The Southern Gentleman had a total of seventy-two chart hits and was named Male Artist of The Decade by *Record World* for the 1960s and 1970s; and

WHEREAS, in addition to “Young Love,” his biggest hits include “Take Good Care of Her” (1966); “It’s the Little Things” (1967); “Running Bear” (1969); “It’s Just a Matter of Time,” “Don’t Keep Me Hangin’ On,” and “Endlessly” (1970); “Empty Arms” (1971); “That’s Why I Love You Like I Do” (1972); “Is it Wrong (For Loving You)” (1974); and “Little Band of Gold” (1975); and

WHEREAS, not only did Sonny James dominate the charts during his period of country music history, he was also a true innovator who was instrumental in creating at least two subgenres; and

WHEREAS, with “Young Love,” Sonny James introduced country music to a new fan base: teenagers; one of the most recognizable hit songs ever and still heard on radio today, “Young Love” was the first traditional country crossover hit and paved the way for similar hits by Ferlin Husky and Marty Robbins; and

WHEREAS, in 1966, Sonny James was the first country artist to record and deliver an R&B song into the country-music mainstream with his chart-topping version of Adam Wade’s “Take Good Care of Her”; he recorded five more songs that had been moderate hits for soulful R&B artists Ivory Joe Hunter, Brook Benton, Clyde Otis, and Jimmy Reed, and each of them also reached number one on the *Billboard* country charts; and

WHEREAS, the next R&B song recorded by a country artist to reach number one did not attain that lofty ranking until April 1976, and thus, Sonny James stood alone for twenty-seven years as a true innovator in expanding country music’s appeal to a wider audience; and

WHEREAS, a handsome young man, Mr. James was one of the first country music artists to benefit from the relatively new medium of television; he was a cast member on *The Ozark Jubilee*, frequently appeared on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, and made guest appearances on Bob Hope and Andy Williams specials; and

WHEREAS, in fact, The Southern Gentleman’s remarkable career was one of firsts; in addition to his chart success and innovations in country music, he was the first country artist to be honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and in 1967, he hosted the first Country Music Association Awards program; and

WHEREAS, in 1962, Sonny James joined the world famous Grand Ole Opry and was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2006; and

WHEREAS, he was honored by his home state in 1987, when he was inducted into the Alabama Music Hall of Fame and received the Lifework Award for Performing Achievement; and

WHEREAS, Mr. James also experienced great success on the other side of the soundboard by producing Marie Osmond's first three albums, each of which contained re-recordings of his number-one hits; her first album and its first single, "Paper Roses," were certified Gold, and Ms. Osmond was nominated for a Grammy Award for "Paper Roses"; and

WHEREAS, Sonny James began his exemplary musical career by performing with his family on a weekly radio show on WMSD-AM in Muscle Shoals, which led to the Loden Family playing dates across the South and appearing on radio shows in Birmingham and Memphis; and

WHEREAS, after his family retired from performing, he joined the Alabama Army National Guard and, in 1950, was a member of one of the first National Guard units to see active duty in Korea; and

WHEREAS, after completing his military service, Sonny James returned home briefly, but soon departed for Nashville to seek fortune and fame, and the rest is history; and

WHEREAS, Mr. James was beloved by his fellow musicians and performers, and he was always ready to share a funny story; accompanied by his boyish smile, this man of deep faith never failed to cultivate his unique gift of making every friend feel as if he or she were his greatest friend every step of the way; and

WHEREAS, Jimmie Hugh Loden (Sonny James) is survived by his beloved wife of fifty-eight years, Doris Shrode Loden; sister-in-law, Sally Ribble; niece, Donna, and husband, "Joe" Mora; nephew, Chuck Holcombe; and Terry, Pam, and Trent Holcombe; and

WHEREAS, he was preceded in death by his father, Archey Loden; mother, Della Loden; and sister, Thelma Lee Holcombe; and

WHEREAS, Sonny James was a musical innovator who always sought to broaden the appeal of country music, and his absence deprives us of a great talent; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CONCURRING, that we celebrate the life of Sonny James, even as we mourn his passing, and reflect fondly on his legacy as a supremely gifted artist, singer, and producer.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to Mr. James's family, friends, and legion of fans.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.